

VZCZCXYZ0002
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHIT #0314 2260526
ZNR UUUUU ZZH (CCY AD9FD49B WSC6442-695)
P 140526Z AUG 09
FM AMCONSUL ISTANBUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9115
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC

UNCLAS ISTANBUL 000314

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D COPY CAPTION
E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [OSCE](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: BACKGROUND TO ATTACK ON CHRISTIAN IN ISTANBUL

¶1. (SBU) Summary. On August 3, a Christian Turk was attacked in Kadikoy, Istanbul, by an acquaintance who recently completed military service. The twenty-minute standoff ended when police officers threatened to open fire. The attacker eventually released the victim after calling him a "missionary dog," accusing him of breaking up the country, and forcing him to wave a Turkish flag. The attack was unprecedented in the last year, and some Christian Turks and a journalist for Compass Direct allege it was a planned propaganda piece used to threaten Turkish Protestants. So far this isolated incident has not been accompanied by any heightened anti-missionary rhetoric in media or among domestic groups, but we will be alert for any trend in anti-minority threats. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) According to a conversation between the victim and our journalist contact, on August 3, 24-year old Yasin Karasu, following Karasu's release from military service, met with 35-year old Ismail Aydin in the basement of a church in Kadikoy to discuss Christianity. On their way out of the building, Karasu reportedly grabbed Aydin and, according to Aydin, said, "You're a missionary dog, and I've come to cut your throat" as he guided Aydin down the street. Aydin explained that "it felt as if we were playing a part in a film. Not a single person on the way down tried to stop him or told him to stop." Within a few minutes the police and a television crew arrived. Upon their arrival, Karasu demanded two Turkish flags from the crowd - forcing Aydin to wave one after he wrapped the other around Aydin's head. Karasu then surrendered willingly to the police, and he remained in police custody at the time of this report. The victim, Aydin, shared with a contact that he will not press charges, but that the police had offered to do so for him.

¶3. (SBU) According to Aydin, over the last year while Karasu was in the army he showed interest in learning more about Christianity and would regularly call Aydin, a convert from Islam, to discuss religion. Aydin said he considered Karasu to be depressed and was "seeking relief" through his weekly calls. He said he believed the attack was an isolated incident and likely not planned. However, other Christians and some members of the police (according to reporting in Compass Direct, an on-line Christian news source) and one journalist suspect it may have been an orchestrated act of propaganda intended to frighten Turkey's small Protestant community. No one was able to specify who might have been behind Karasu's act. (Note: According to Article 24 of the Turkish Constitution, people of all faiths have the right to spread information about their faith. While proselytizing is not illegal, it is viewed by many as a threat to the nation. Until recently, eighth grade Turkish textbooks included several pages of information warning of the grave threats to the nation posed by missionaries in Turkey.)

¶4. (SBU) Comment: The physical attack on a Christian in Istanbul on August 3 came as a surprise to those who follow religious freedom in Turkey given the ebb in alleged social abuse against religious minorities over the last year. Until this event, there had been no reports of physical violence against religious minorities in the last year. Some, like HR lawyer Orhan Kemal Cengiz and professor and author of the "I Apologize Campaign" Cengiz Aktar speculated during prior discussions that the arrests associated with the Ergenekon indictments caused the lull in violence. So far this isolated incident has not been accompanied by any heightened anti-missionary rhetoric in media or among domestic groups, but we will be alert for any trend in anti-minority threats.

End Comment.

WIENER